


<p>Cabinet</p> <p>28 October 2020</p>	 <p>TOWER HAMLETS</p>
<p>Report of:</p> <p>James Thomas, Corporate Director, Children and Culture Denise Radley, Corporate Director, Health, Adults and Community,</p>	<p>Classification: Unrestricted</p>
<p>Tower Hamlets Travel Assistance Policy</p>	

Lead Member	Councillor Danny Hassell, Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Young People
Originating Officer(s)	Ronke Martins-Taylor, Divisional Director, Youth and Commissioning Anthony Harris, Interim Head of Service, Children's Integrated Commissioning Team
Wards affected	All
Key Decision?	Yes
Forward Plan Notice Published	16 July 2020
Reason for Key Decision	Impact on Wards
Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome	People are aspirational, independent and have equal access to opportunities

Executive Summary

Historically Tower Hamlets has had a range of policies and statements across Children and Adult services in relation to access and delivery of Travel Assistance. This report highlights progress towards completing a single Tower Hamlets Travel Assistance Policy, aimed at promoting greater independence for all service users, whilst also supporting the delivery of financially sustainable services.

Cabinet will note the initial intention was to solely revise the Children's Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) Home to School Travel Assistance Policy following an 11-week public consultation, between 26th February 2020 and 11th May 2020. The decision to include all policies/statements from across Children and Culture (C&C) and Health, Adults and Community (HAC) into a single unified policy was made in the Transport Demand Board, post SEND consultation. This informs why there was not a separate, or joint consultation on Travel Assistance across the Council held at the time.

In meeting the strategic objectives agreed by Lead Members in December 2019, it was crucial that all current policy positions were aligned to create a single cohesive approach across the Council.

Whilst existing policies across directorates had appropriate content and aligned to statutory requirements, they were fragmented and had no clear read across at crucial periods of transition from Children's to Adult services. The policies also lacked a single overarching narrative for Travel Assistance in Tower Hamlets and were not formally supported and signed off via Cabinet.

The attached policy introduces a life course approach to delivering Travel Assistance across the Council, whilst continuing to outline the statutory responsibilities for each service area. The revised policy provides a single cohesive position that has until now been lacking in Tower Hamlets, the implementation of which will support the operational delivery of services in meeting the strategic objectives.

The report highlights the:

- The background and rationale for introducing a borough wide Travel Assistance policy
- The expected outcomes of having a revised policy in place
- London Borough of Tower Hamlets Travel Assistance Policy - DRAFT (Appendix 1)

Key Issues:

- £0.5m MTFs savings are assigned to Children's SEND Home to School Travel Assistance for 21/22, and a further £0.5m for 22/23. The policy will support achieving these savings.
- HAC have submitted a savings proposal for Travel Assistance which aims to save £200k over 2021/22 and 2022/23. Whilst the revised policy does not impact these savings, they are worth noting for context. As a matter of course the Transport Demand Board will monitor progress against all proposed savings in this area.

Risk Implications:

Should the revised Travel Assistance Policy not be approved and implemented, the following risks are highlighted for consideration:

- A continuation of fragmented and disparate policies, preventing there from being a single reference point for Tower Hamlets colleagues, stakeholders and population.
- The delivery of Travel Assistance services across Tower Hamlets will be less cohesive and would not have a single unified, considered and agreed policy, designed to support strategic objectives.
- In the absence of a robust policy agreed at Cabinet by Lead Members, Tower Hamlets is vulnerable to challenge when new ways of working are introduced and could risk savings assigned to Travel Assistance across directorates.

Budget: There is £0.5m MTFs assigned to SEND Home to School Travel Assistance for 2021/22, and a further £0.5m for 2022/23.

A clear and robust policy formally agreed through Tower Hamlets governance will support work underway to ensure services are financially viable for future years.

Legal: Contributors from across C&C and HAC have ensured their input is aligned to appropriate Acts and central government guidance. The Acts and guidance informing the policy are below:

- Education Act (1996)
- DfE Home to school travel and transport guidance: Statutory guidance for local authorities (2014)
- Care Act (2014)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Endorse and approve the revised Travel Assistance Policy, which can then be implemented fully by the end of 2020.

1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 To provide Tower Hamlets with a single, cohesive Travel Assistance policy, formally agreed by Lead Members. This will replace the current disparate policy positions in place across the Council and will support new and improved ways of working.

2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 The decision to revise the Tower Hamlets Travel Assistance for SEND Home to School followed a paper presented at MAB 9th December, entitled 'Improving SEND and Social Care Transport'. External consultants, Grant Thornton outlined the following options in relation to Tower Hamlets being able to deliver financially sustainable Travel Assistance services in the future:

- Option 1: Do nothing
- Option 2: Operational efficiencies
- Option 3: Supportive policy improvements
- Option 4: Restrictive policy and structural changes

- 2.2 Lead Members agreed an approach between option 3 and 4; whilst ensuring option 2 was fully explored as part of business as usual.

- 2.3 The revised policy for which approval is being sought has already been cited as the preferred option by Lead Members in relation to SEND.

- 2.4 The alternative options for a Travel Assistance Policy pertaining to Adult service users are as follows:

- Continue with existing policies
- Revise an adult focused Travel Assistance policy

- 2.5 Both alternatives are juxtaposed to the central objective outlined in this paper, which is to have a single cohesive policy that follows a life course approach to the delivery of services.

3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT

3.1 Introduction

3.2 As a consequence of a project undertaken with the support of Grant Thornton, council officers from four Directorates (Place, Children Services and Culture, Resources and HAC) have been working on improving the council's performance with regard to promoting independence and securing improved value for money. The work is being driven through existing fora, with one group tasked to complete a revised Tower Hamlets wide Travel Assistance Policy covering Children's and Adults provision.

3.2 The group leading on the revised policy has membership from across HAC, Children's Commissioning, Strategy, Policy and Performance (SPP), Intelligence and Performance, Pupil Services, and Comms as required. The scope of this group includes performance reporting, however this report speaks directly to the progress of the Travel Assistance Policy

3.4 The policy is due to be presented at Cabinet in October, if approved, the aim is to implement before the end of 2020.

3.5 This report highlights:

- The background and rationale for introducing a borough wide Travel Assistance policy
- The expected outcomes revised policy
- London Borough of Tower Hamlets Travel Assistance Policy - DRAFT (Appendix 1)

4. Background / Rationale

4.1 A key driver for revisiting the Travel Assistance policy in relation to SEND home to school transport is the increased demand and expenditure year on year, which, if left unattended would become an unmanageable financial pressure.

4.2 The increase in demand and the associated cost pressures are best presented in a report to the Mayors Advisory Board (MAB) in December 2019

by external consultations, Grant Thornton. The report presented the following options in relation to the future of SEND home to school travel:

- Option 1: Do nothing
- Option 2: Implement operational efficiencies
- Option 3: Implement supportive policy improvements
- Option 4: Implement a restrictive policy and structural changes

4.3 Following MAB, Lead Members agreed on a position between option 3 and 4, whilst ensuring all efficiencies alluded to in option 2 are fully explored as part of business as usual.

4.4 Following the decision by Lead Members, a SEND home to school Travel Assistance consultation was held to seek input and steer towards a new Travel Assistance policy for this area. The consultation period launched on 26th February 2020 and the online survey closed on 11th May 2020, a period of nearly 11 weeks. A fourfold increase in responses was achieved in the final two weeks as a result of campaign of phoning stakeholders; primarily parents and carers whose children currently SEND receive Travel Assistance.

4.5 The initial draft of the consultation feedback is attached for reference (Appendix 2).

4.6 Initially the driver for group leading on the policy was to focus on SEND Home to School Travel Assistance; however, early in the process it was agreed that there was an opportunity to increase the scope of the policy to include all areas where Travel Assistance is offered across C&C and HAC.

4.7 The pros and cons of such an approach were duly considered prior to start of the project. The pros being:

- Having a single Travel Assistance reference point for Tower Hamlets residents and professionals
- Eliminate duplication and any potential conflicting messages in the current fragmented policies and statements
- Reflect a life course approach to Travel Assistance, which includes the transition from Children's to Adults services.
- Supports the option previously agreed by Lead Members

4.8 The cons of this approach were primarily focused on the resources and capacity pressures to complete the piece.

4.9 Through existing governance it was agreed the revised policy would include all services across C&C and HAC where Travel Assistance is delivered.

5. Outcomes

5.1 The outcomes expected by the successful implementation of a new policy are:

1. Promote greater independence, choice and freedom for children, families and adults requiring Travel Assistance
2. To formally introduce a broader range of Travel Assistance options which are more cost effective than the traditional offer which has focused on utilising the inhouse fleet and external taxis.
3. For a single policy to be in place that guides and supports operational delivery of Travel Assistance Services across all directorates, and as such will support the strategic objectives as cited in Grant Thornton paper in 2019.

5.2 An example of the how the expected outcomes will be achieved is best viewed through the example of introducing Personal Travel Budgets (PTB). PTBs provide families with greater choice, control and freedom as to the form of Travel Assistance they wish to use either for themselves or their child, and when they wish to use this agreed form of assistance.

5.3 Early indications show a comparative cost avoidance/saving against more expensive Travel Assistance of as much as 70%.

5.4 MAB should note that the introduction of new Travel Assistance initiatives such as PTBs have not been delayed, nor are they contingent on the sign off of the tabled policy.

5.5 The completed and approved policy will support the Council by having a robust strategic position in relation to the delivery of these services going forward.

6. Travel Assistance Policy - Draft

6.1 The draft Tower Hamlets Travel Assistance Policy is attached (Appendix 1) and has been informed by relevant legislation including DfE guidelines on home to school travel and the Care Act 2014.

6.2 The ambition of the policy was to weave and integrate the different approaches taken to Travel Assistance from across the Council into a seamless coherent document. There have been some notable successes in meeting this objective, however given the differing eligibility criteria, Travel

Assistance options, applications and appeals processes across the Council there continues to be a degree of separation between cohorts.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 The strong cross-departmental work has strengthened the policy position for Tower Hamlets, with all contributors agreeing a single unified policy is the correct strategic approach to take locally.
- 7.2 Once signed off and implemented the policy will be the solid foundation upon which Tower Hamlets can work towards its strategic aims to deliver financially sustainable services, whilst also promoting great choice, control and independence.

8 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- a. Please see appendix 3.

9 OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:

- Best Value Implications,
- Consultations,
- Environmental (including air quality),
- Risk Management,
- Crime Reduction,
- Safeguarding.
- Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment.

COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 10.1 The implementation of the Travel Assistance policy will enable more cost efficient travel options to be offered to clients. These efficiencies will support the delivery of MTFs savings of £0.5m in 2021/22 and a further £0.5m of savings in 2022/23.

COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

11.1 Section 508B of the Education Act 1996 requires local authorities in England to provide free transport to and from school for eligible children in their area, as defined in Schedule 35B of the Education Act 1996. In addition, under Section 508C Education Act 1996, local authorities in England may make arrangements for home to school transport for children who are not eligible children. Local authorities in England are required by paragraph 10 of the School Information (England) Regulations 2008 to publish their policies in relation to the discharge of their functions under the above sections.

11.2 Statutory guidance 'Home to school travel and transport guidance' (July 2014) should be followed unless there are good reasons for not following it.

11.3 In relation to adults, local authorities may meet their needs for care and support under the Care Act 2014 and the statutory guidance relating to it, 'Care and Support Statutory Guidance', updated 24 June 2020.

11.4 Local authorities must be mindful of their duties under the Equalities Act 2010 and in particular the public sector equalities duty under Section 149 of that Act.

11.5 The proposals set out in this report comply with the above legislation and guidance.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- NONE

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Travel Assistance Policy 2020
- Appendix 2 – Update on the consultation
- Appendix 3 and 4 – Equality Impact Analysis

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

- None

Officer contact details for documents:

N/A